

11. Ancient India and the World

11.1 India and the countries of the west

11.2 India and other countries in Asia

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People of the Harappan civilisation had developed trade relations with the countries of the west. Ever since then, India has had economic and cultural exchanges with the outside world. Buddhism had spread to Afghanistan and to many countries of Central Asia. During the period of the Iranian empire, India's contact with the western world increased. The Greek historians of that period grew more curious about India. Their writings introduced India to the western world. The routes which were later used by Alexander, were opened for trade between India and the countries of the west. Under the influence of the Greek art of sculpture, a new form of art emerged in India during the Kushana period. It is called Gandhara school of art. In the Gandhar art school images of Gautam Buddha were mainly carved. As these images were mostly found in the Gandhara region of Afghanistan, the style is called the 'Gandhara style'.

A statue of
Gautama
Buddha in a
museum in
Paris – in the
Gandhara Style.



The facial features of the statues made in this style are similar to those of the Greek people. The early coins that were minted in India were also like Greek coins.



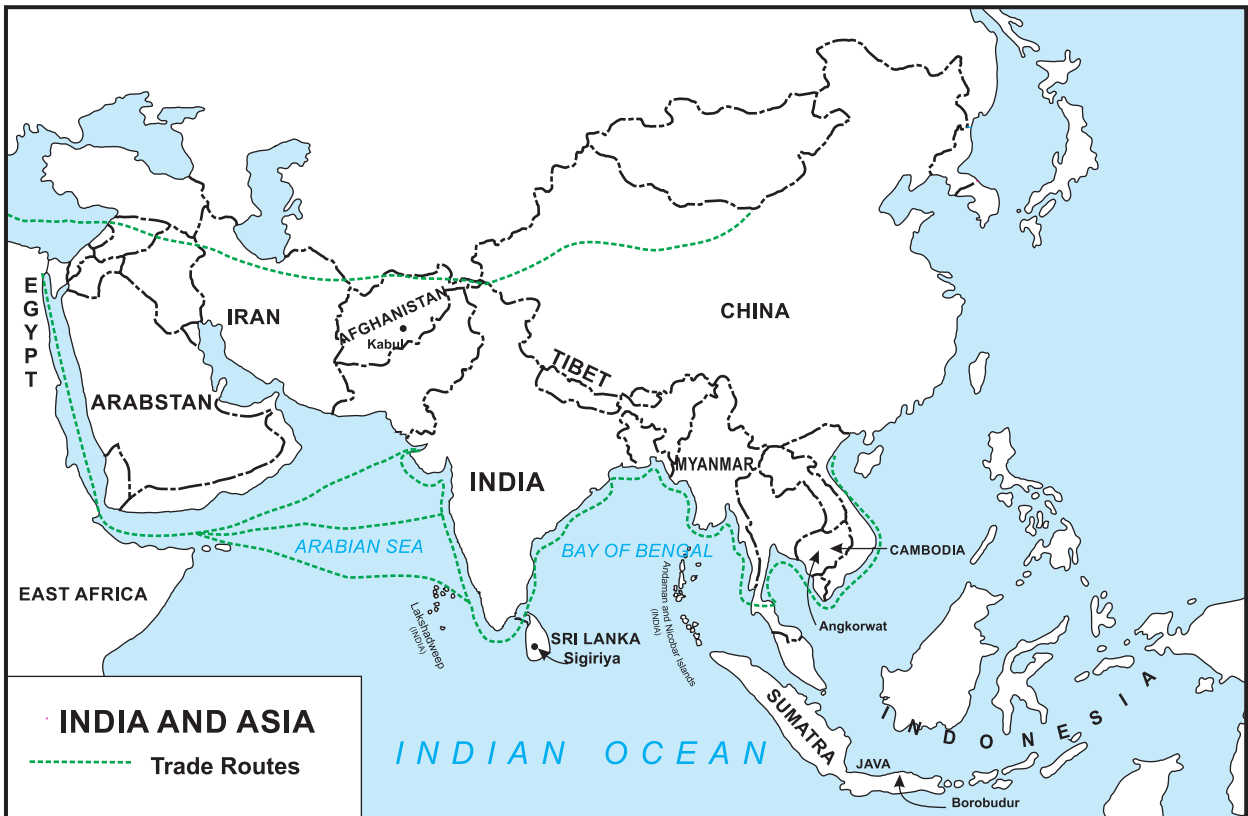
A sculpture in the Gandhara style on a stupa at Hadda in Afghanistan. (Greek costumes, amphora and musical instruments)

Around the first or second century CE, trade between India and Rome flourished. The ports in South India also had a large share in this trade. Some articles made of bronze were found in the excavations at Kolhapur. They have been made in Rome. The excavations at Arikamedu in Tamil Nadu have also brought to light many articles made in Rome. Both these places were important centres of trade between India and Rome. Many such trade centres are mentioned in the literature of those times.



A gold coin of the Roman Emperor Augustus found at Arikamedu





Alexandria was an important port in Egypt. The Arab merchants carried Indian goods up to Alexandria. From there, they were sent to the countries in Europe. Besides Indian goods, the Arabs also conveyed Indian philosophy and science to Europe. The concept of ‘zero’ is one of India’s major contributions to the world. It was the Arabs who introduced this Indian concept to Europe.

11.2 India and other countries in Asia

Many countries in Asia were greatly influenced by the Indian culture of those times.



A wall painting in the Sigiriya caves

Sri Lanka : King Ashoka had sent his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra to Sri Lanka to spread Buddhism. Their names are mentioned in the Buddhist text ‘Mahavamsa’ written in Sri Lanka. Sanghamitra carried a branch of the Bodhi tree with her. The Sri Lankan tradition believes that the Bodhi tree at Anuradhpur in Sri Lanka has grown from the same branch.

There was a great demand in India for Sri Lankan pearls and other precious stones. In the fifth century CE King Kashyap had caves dug out at a place called ‘Sigiriya’. The wall paintings in these caves bear a resemblance to the paintings in the Ajanta Caves. The Sri Lankan Buddhist works ‘Dipavamsa’ and ‘Mahavamsa’ provide information about the close relations between India and Sri Lanka. They are written in the Pali language.

China and other countries : Right from the ancient times, India and China had established trade and cultural relations. Emperor Harshavardhan had even sent an ambassador to the Chinese court. Chinese silk was known as ‘Chinanshuka’, and was in great demand in India. Merchants in ancient India supplied Chinese silk to western countries. The land route by which the silk trade was carried on, was called the ‘Silk Route’. Some ancient places in India were connected to this route. Nala-sopara near Mumbai in Maharashtra was one such place. The Chinese Buddhist *bhikkhus* Fa Hien and Yuan Chwang also came to India through this silk route.

In the first century CE, the Ming Emperor of China invited the Buddhist

bhikkhus Dharmarakshaka and Kashyapmatanga to China. The *bhikkhus* translated many Indian Buddhist texts into the Chinese language. This gave impetus to the spread of Buddhism in China. Later on, Buddhism also reached Japan, Korea and Vietnam.

Countries in Southeast Asia : The ancient kingdom of ‘Funan’ in Cambodia was established in the first century CE. Evidence is available from Chinese traditions that an Indian named Kaundinya established it. People of Funan knew the Sanskrit language. A stone inscription of that period is still in existence. It is in Sanskrit. In many other countries of Southeast Asia too, small kingdoms established by people of Indian origin had emerged. These kingdoms helped to spread Indian culture in Southeast Asia.

Indian culture had a deep impact on the art and cultural life of Southeast Asia. Dance-dramas based on stories from the two Indian epics ‘Ramayana’ and ‘Mahabharata’ are popular in Indonesia even today. This influence continued to increase over the years. In the ancient period, the Buddhist religion spread to Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, etc. In the later years, temples of Lord Shiva and Vishnu were also built there.

This year, we have reviewed Indian history from 3000 BCE to the eighth century CE. Next year, we will study the history of India from the ninth century CE to the eighteenth century CE. The history of this period is known as ‘Medieval History’.





Exercise

1. Name the following.

- (1) Places where articles made in Rome were found.
- (2) A new style of art that emerged during the Kushana period in India.
- (3) The language of the books, Mahavansa and Deepvansa.
- (4) A country to which Buddhism had spread in the ancient period.

2. Think and expand/elaborate :

- (1) Indian culture had an impact on Southeast Asia.
- (2) The spread of Buddhism in China became easier.

3. What would you do if you are encouraged in your favourite hobby?

4. Describe a picture.

A picture of the Gandhara style sculpture on a stupa in Hadda, Afghanistan is given in this chapter. Observe it and write about it.

5. Find out more about –

- (1) The Gandhara style of art
- (2) The Silk Route

6. Mark the countries of Southeast Asia mentioned in the chapter on an outline map.

Activity :

Obtain information about a form of art of your choice and present it in your class.

